



News-Democrat/Christina Macias

PROTECTION: John Johnson of Environmental Restoration carried boxes of covers for the dirt.

Toxic waste proves far worse than expected at Sauget dump

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SAUGET — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has stumbled onto 860 drums of toxic waste at a site in Dead Creek, more than five times what they expected to find.

"We suspected this was a landfill from aerial photographs," said Michael McAteer, EPA remedial project manager. "We knew something was out there. The question was, 'What?'"

The agency expected to find at least 150 drums when it began removing waste from a 40-acre site on Elevated Cargill Road in October, but were surprised by the degree of dumping, McAteer said. By late November, workers had removed about 6,000 tons of contaminated soil, said Kevin Turner, a U.S. EPA representative.

The area, named site Q, is a 93-acre stretch of land found on the southern tip of Dead Creek, an area of toxic dumping for more than 40 years.

Site Q was chosen because it is highly contaminated and is at risk of flooding because of its location between the flood wall and the Mississippi River, McAteer said. The problem was highlighted by the 1993 floods, which unearthed contamination and flooded neighboring homes. Rather than clean up all of Site Q on limited

resources, the EPA chose the 40 most contaminated acres of land.

The chemicals, which include paint and suspected cancer-causing agents, were found below the surface of Site Q beginning Oct. 25, and have been recovered from as deep as 4 feet below ground, McAteer said. Workers discovered the lower-lying drums while removing waste at the surface, he said. Some of the recovered drums bear the name of industrial companies such as Dow Co. and Monsanto Corp., he said.

The drums appear to have been piled together and crushed, and it seems dumpers poured toxic waste into the land because of the neat layers of paint that have formed in the soil, he said. McAteer did not know how far down into the soil the drums are buried.

The drums will be shipped out of Illinois by railway, the cheapest option, and one that will not congest streets with trucks, McAteer said.

Officials have not made a final decision, but expect to treat the waste and deposit it at a landfill in Oklahoma, he said. The effort will cost the EPA about \$2.4 million and should be completed by February, he said. The agency has hired Environmental Restoration, a St. Louis contractor, to remove the waste.

More waste lies below the surface, but EPA officials may soon discontinue digging from lack of funding, McAteer said.

"We need to figure out how to get it out of there," McAteer said. "If we start bringing all of this stuff to the surface and we don't have the money to take it to Oklahoma, then it's just going to sit there and we don't want that."

The removal is being funded by federal Superfund money, but the land has not yet been declared a Superfund site, McAteer said. Superfund sites are toxic dumping sites that are cleaned up using federal dollars. But the cleanup is incomplete.

The EPA may apply for more funding to secure the site by covering it to prevent drums from being exposed. The agency may also try to hold the 25 other companies suspected in the dumping accountable, McAteer said.

Site Q is one of two sites with which the EPA has become involved. The second is known as Area 1 and like Site Q, is highly contaminated and is found on the southern tip of Dead Creek. The U.S. EPA stepped in this year after the Illinois EPA unsuccessfully tried to make the companies accountable.

The U.S. agency has ordered Solutia Inc. to investigate the extent of contamination in both areas and create a waste removal plan. Solutia, which produces chemicals for motor oil, dyes and pain relievers, polluted the creek while operating as Monsanto. Solutia's findings should be available in April 2001.